



STATEMENT BY

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about international trafficking victims and the role that the Department of Health and Human Services plays in providing assistance to these victims under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, as amended (TVPA). The trafficking of women, children, and men into the United States for use in the sex industry, sweatshop labor, domestic servitude, and migrant agricultural labor has been estimated to involve 14,500 to 17,500 persons annually. The TVPA initiated a comprehensive effort to combat this scourge by providing enhanced punishment of traffickers as well as support for the identification, protection and care of victims.

Under TVPA, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), within the Department of Health and Human Services, plays a key role in the fight against human trafficking. We are responsible for certifying foreign persons as trafficking victims in the United States and assisting them in accessing the benefits and services needed to rebuild their lives. In addition, we have been charged with promoting the public's awareness of trafficking and the services available to trafficking victims. Before discussing each of these activities in more detail, I would like to share some background on what we know about victims from abroad trafficked into the United States.

Background

International trafficking victims are drawn from countries throughout the world often through the use of force, coercion or fraud. Traffickers may mislead skilled or educated adults facing chronic unemployment as they search for higher paying jobs or a better life; buy or coerce

children from families facing poverty and economic desperation; or abduct their victims.

Victims find themselves physically and socially isolated in an unfamiliar culture in which they may not speak or understand the language. Often victims do not have immigration documents and traffickers may threaten physical harm to the victim or to a loved one left behind in the country of origin. Many victims are raped or beaten into terrified submission. As a result, when international trafficking victims do come in contact with law enforcement officers, health providers or other people who would be in a position to help them, they are afraid to come forward.

To date, we have certified over 1,000 victims of trafficking in the United States. The majority of these international victims have come from Latin America, namely El Salvador and Mexico, and Asia, primarily Korea and China. Over 62% of the victims were from Central and South America, with 28% from El Salvador alone. Another 23% of the victims were from Asia. In addition, individuals have been trafficked from such diverse countries as Bangladesh, Cameroon, India and Russia. Eight percent of these victims were minors and nearly 94% were female.

Human trafficking takes place throughout the United States and over the past year we have found victims in 20 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Saipan. The largest concentration of victims was found in Texas, where over 100 victims were certified this fiscal year.

I would like to turn now to describe our efforts to certify these trafficking victims and facilitate their access to benefits and services.

Certification and Victims Assistance

Prior to enactment of the TVPA, trafficking victims lacking legal status in the United States were not eligible for most types of public assistance or services. Under the TVPA, ACF is given the authority to certify foreign adult victims of trafficking so that they may receive the same benefits and services available to refugees, thereby giving these victims access to both state and federal assistance programs. We consult on a daily basis with staff at the U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division (CRT), which investigates and prosecutes trafficking cases and refers appropriate cases to ACF for certification. Before an adult can be certified, law enforcement must deem the individual a victim of a severe form of trafficking, the adult must receive appropriate documentation from the Department of Justice or the Department of Homeland Security, and must be willing to assist in the investigation and prosecution of the traffickers.

Once certified, the adult may receive benefits from a wide range of programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, food stamps, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). For those who do not qualify for TANF and Medicaid, an eight-month transitional program for single adults and childless couples, providing cash and medical assistance, is available.

In addition, we work with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) to assist in the issuance of Employment Authorization Documents.

These documents are a critical component of our efforts because they allow victims to participate in work programs and become self sufficient. Employment improves a victim's self-esteem and increases confidence and stability.

While eligible for the same benefits as adults, international victims of severe forms of trafficking who are under 18 years of age do not need to be certified. Once established as victims of trafficking, children are issued a letter of eligibility by ACF and then can enter the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor program which has a long history of providing comprehensive services specially designed for youth. We coordinate placement of minors based on individual needs, taking into consideration their cultural, linguistic and religious background, as well as any special health, educational and emotional needs. Services include housing, food, clothing, medical and mental health services, intensive case management, and education are provided through this program.

In April of this year, in order to more efficiently provide services to international victims of human trafficking in any location within the United States, we awarded a single national "Per Capita Victim Services" contract to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Under this contract, a defined financial stipend is provided to each victim. This per-capita approach will ensure efficiency and improve access to the best possible services for victims. Improved access to comprehensive case management, shelter, food, transportation, legal assistance, job training and health care will better enable these individuals to establish lives free of violence and exploitation.

A brief story of the types of victims served, will give a better understanding of the range of services needed by these victims. In just this past year, we identified over 100 women who were trafficked into the U.S. after being told of opportunities to work in restaurants and earn a good living in America. After they arrived in the United States, the women were informed they had incurred large debts and would need to work to pay back those who had brought them to America. Jobs were provided in bars and restaurants, but in too many cases these jobs went far beyond working as a waitress.

In some instances, these women were forced to drink large quantities of alcohol during their shift, worked over 12 hours a day, and lived in housing controlled by their traffickers. Worse yet, the victims were forced to participate in “dates” purchased by bar patrons. To keep their victims compliant, traffickers often beat and otherwise punished women who were late, did not show to work, or were seen not to perform up to the traffickers’ standards. Moreover, women who were found to be pregnant were forced to have abortions.

When found and rescued from these abhorrent conditions, we learned that some of these women had been held in captivity for over four years. Many of these women will continue to suffer extreme health problems due to their enslavement, but as a result of the TVPA the victims have been provided medical care, counseling, English classes, and many other services.

We have seen other examples of the insidious nature of trafficking where women came to the United States and entered into “good-faith” marriages in which their husbands ended up being their trafficker. The men promised them the good life in America - a fresh start in the land of

opportunity. Instead, these men said that the only way to make money was through prostitution. The men forced their wives to work as prostitutes and threatened to tell families back home if the women tried to leave. Some of the women, once identified, decided to return to their families, some decided they did not need any services, while others decided they want to pursue a better life in America. These individuals have received HHS certification, entered into programs to learn English, and are now working and surviving on their own

Outreach Efforts

In addition to certification and assistance activities for international trafficking victims, the TVPA requires us, in coordination with other designated federal agencies, to establish and carry out programs to increase public awareness about trafficking in persons. We are hopeful that our efforts to increase public awareness will encourage many more victims to step forward and seek help, and will make those who encounter victims more aware of what they are seeing. Despite the passage of TVPA and increased attention to the problem of trafficking, many remain unaware of the plight of trafficking victims.

Therefore, we have taken several steps to expand public awareness. We established the *Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking* public awareness campaign, which promotes public awareness about trafficking and the protections available for trafficking victims. The goal of the campaign is to help communities identify and serve more victims of trafficking so that every individual forced, coerced, or fraudulently induced into exploitative work will have the courage

and support to come forward and receive the full protection and benefits offered under the Trafficking Act.

The goal of the campaign is to educate those persons or entities who are most likely to come into contact with victims such as local law enforcement officials, social service providers, health care professionals, faith-based organizations, domestic violence groups, ethnic organizations, refugee assistance professionals, homeless assistance professionals, drug rehabilitation organizations, child protective services officials, juvenile court officials, educational organizations, and legal assistance organizations. The general message points of the Campaign are that victims of trafficking are numerous but often inconspicuous; victims are not criminals; the government is able to help victims; here's how to recognize a victim; and here's what to do if you are, or you know, of a victim.

In addition to promoting public awareness about trafficking, the Rescue and Restore campaign also established coalitions in 16 cities, including Tampa, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Atlanta, St. Louis, and Portland, and the State of Illinois. The coalitions consist of dedicated law enforcement personnel, social service providers, local government officials, health care professionals and leaders of faith-based and ethnic organizations. The goal of the coalitions is to increase the number of trafficking victims who are identified, assisted in leaving the circumstances of their servitude, and certified so that they may receive benefits and services. Along with identifying and assisting victims, coalition members use the campaign messages to educate the general public about human trafficking.

Another component of the public awareness campaign is the 24/7 toll-free trafficking Information and Referral hotline. The purpose of the Hotline is first and foremost to provide service referrals to potential trafficking victims. In addition, the Hotline crisis workers educate callers about Rescue and Restore campaign materials, direct non-trafficking related questions to relevant Federal and local agencies, and take reports on possible trafficking cases. Tips and relevant information are sent to the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice.

For example, the Trafficking Hotline received a call from the National Domestic Violence Hotline concerning a young Mexican woman who only spoke Spanish. The woman, a 15-year old juvenile with two children, was calling from a phone booth. The victim said she was sold to a man for \$25,000 by her mother in Mexico when she was 11 years old and the man brought her to the U.S. to live with him. She said that this man had been abusive to her, would drink and hit her, and had raped her and forced her to have sex with him in front of her two children. She reported that she had not been allowed to leave the home without him. She was afraid that this man would find her and was looking for help in getting away from this situation. The Hotline worker connected the call to a service provider who was able to arrange a taxi ride that transported the victim to safety.

We work closely with groups who have experience in providing outreach efforts to vulnerable populations, such as homeless and at-risk youth. In FY 2005 we awarded 18 grants for street outreach to organizations to help them identify victims of trafficking among populations they already were assisting. This week, we will award 18 new street outreach grants. These grants

support direct, person-to-person contact, information sharing, counseling and other communication with targeted populations.

As part of our continuing efforts to improve our outreach efforts, as well as better target services to restore self-sufficiency to victims of human trafficking so they may live productive, safe and healthy lives, we are convening a Conference on Survivors of Sex Trafficking, this Thursday.

The purpose of this conference is to highlight the stories of survivors of sex trafficking, examine case management for victims of sex trafficking, and share lessons learned in identifying and caring for victims of sex trafficking. The conference will allow survivors to share their physical, emotional, financial and legal needs and what has helped them on their road to recovery. There will be presentations by case managers demonstrating effective strategies for addressing victim needs, and the conference will offer results and lessons learned from the trafficking program's street outreach grantees so that participants can understand the best interventions for identifying victims of sex trafficking.

Conclusion

Since the passage of the TVPA, we have addressed trafficking at many levels. We have partnered with other Federal agencies in order to set up processes for certification to enable identified victims to apply for benefits and services. We have provided funding to service providing agencies to address international trafficking victims' needs and assist them with accessing the mainstream public benefits. We provided outreach grants for service providers and community members to create more awareness about human trafficking and help identify

victims. We also provided education and outreach across the country to raise the level of awareness with educational institutions, law enforcement agencies, and many types of service providers. We are committed to building on our experience and continuing to improve our efforts to identify, rescue, and restore more victims of traffic. We appreciate the opportunity provided by this Committee to highlight the tragedy of the lives surrounding these trafficking victims.

I'd be pleased to address any questions you may have.